FONDATION
DE L'INNOVATION
POUR LA DÉMOCRATIE

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS
SYMPOSIUM AND EXHIBITION AT THE INNOVATION AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY FAIR IN THE SERVICE OF DEMOCRACY, IN ACCRA GHANA

How does project concretely contribute to democratic life, civic participation, public accountability and citizenship

Are you a developer, designer, tech enthusiast, researcher on tech, or the initiator of an innovative tech project? Do you want to help protect democracy in West Africa? Take part as an exhibitor at the Innovation Fair!

I- THE INNOVATION AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY FAIR

Why is this Fair?

Against a backdrop of rapid technological development, the West-Mediterranean Laboratory of the Innovation Foundation for Democracy is launching a call for projects to organize a fair focus on innovation and democracy. Overall objective: To help promote technological initiatives in the service of democratic innovation.

Who can take part?

Developers, engineers, designers, digital project leaders, tech collectives, start-ups or students studying computer science, app development or UX/UI design.

II-THE COMPETITIVE INNOVATION CHALLENGE OF DIGITAL PROJECTS

Why is this Competitive Challenge?

The West-Mediterranean Laboratory of the Innovation Foundation for Democracy will also organize a competitive innovation challenge of digital projects serving democratic practices and social transformation in West Africa. This Challenge will help identify project showing how Digital innovation is radically transforming democratic decision-making and public administrations are experimenting with mobile applications (apps) to provide citizens with real-time information, using online platforms to crowdsource ideas, and testing algorithms to engage communities in daily administration in West Africa.

Objectives of the Innovation Challenge

The Overall objective of this challenge is to help promote technological initiatives in the service of democratic innovation in West Africa.
The specific objectives are:

-To bring together technologically innovative Projects serving Democracy in West Africa,
-To select 20 Innovative digital projects transforming democratic decision-making and public administrations in West Africa
-To promote the selected projects to the stakeholders for further implementation,
-To provide continuous support for the development of selected projects.

Who can take part?

Developers, engineers, designers, digital project leaders, tech collectives, start-ups or students studying computer science, app development or UX/UI design.

Competition process for participation in the exhibition fair and the project challenge

- Applications open:

- Applications close:

- Shortlisting phase: 20 projects selected based on their applications:

- Interview phase: presentation to a jury:

- Announcement of the winner in October 2026 in Abidjan:

III-THE SOCIAL INNOVATION AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE SERVICE OF DEMOCRACY SYMPOSIUM AND WORKSHOP

Why this symposium and Workshop?

The West-Mediterranean Laboratory of the Innovation Foundation for Democracy during this fair will also organize a symposium and workshop on the general Topic "Social **innovation and digital technology serving democracy in West Africa**".

Social innovation regarding democracy aims to address the current challenges facing democracy, as demonstrated by the work of Graham Smith. Thus, various remedies for the shortcomings of representative democracy are being tested and proving effective, though they do have limitations. Such is the case with participatory budgeting as practiced in certain American cities or in Brazil, or, more generally, deliberative democracy based on the role of citizens' juries, citizens' assemblies, and consensus conferences. The basic idea remains the very same: to implement a form of democratic engineering that functions more effectively. Alongside these types of mechanisms, there are processes of collaborative democracy, such as those being tested, for example, by the Brainport-Eindhoven region in the Netherlands. (Dzur, Democracy Inside: Participatory Innovation in Unlikely Places, 2018 ; Hendriks, Rethinking Democratic Innovation : Cultural Clashes and the Reform of Democracy, 2023 ; Wampler and Goldfrank, The rise, Spread, and Decline of Brazil's Participatory Budgeting : the Arc of a Democratic Innovation, 2022). How could these various initiatives, which increasingly rely on technological innovation, be adapted to the African context?

When talking about technological innovation in Africa as a whole and West Africa in particular the key question is what technology breakthrough means for governance systems created long before digital disruption. If we can underline that policymakers in West Africa are hoping that technology can be used to legitimize the public sector, re-engage citizens in politics and combat civic apathy (Noveck and Glover 2019). It is important to recall that if the digitalization of democracy is left unquestioned (Gray and Purdy 2018), the danger is that the building blocks of democracy itself will be eroded (Innes and Booher 2018).

Three global trends are driving the ongoing digitalization of democratic decision-making (Bernholz, Landemore, and Reich 2021). The First are demographic, highlighting growing global inequalities, showing that in the West the differentials of power among social groups will be on the rise, whereas in Eastern and African countries democratic freedoms will be at risk of further decline (Landemore 2020). Second, a more urbanized global population will make cities ideal settings for innovative approaches to democratic decision-making (Gastil 2021). Current instances of digital democracy being used at local level include blockchain technology for voting and online crowdsourcing platforms. Third, technological advancements will cut the costs of civic mobilization and pose new challenges for democratic

systems (Fischli and Muldoon 2024). Going forward, democratic decision-makers will be required to bridge digital literacy gaps, secure public structures from hacking, and to protect citizens' privacy (Klein 2022; Muldoon 2022).

In Africa at large and West Africa, with online spaces having replaced physical spaces as venues for political argument and social interaction, the full digitalization of democratic processes seems inevitable (Forestal 2022; Landemore 2020), also because traditional democratic systems are perceived as inefficient due to strong customary belief and poverty (Mbembe 2023). Daily interactions with bureaucracies appear lethargic when compared with the dynamic relationships people entertain with digital arenas (Thompson 2021). Whether it be convincing people to vote, or engaging them in administration proceedings, digital tools seem to offer a way out of the issues of contemporary democracies(Cohen and Fung 2021, 25; Forestal 2022): declining trust (Novak and Krasovec 2025), disengagement from politics (Theuwis, Van Ham and Jacobs 2025), or political instability (Babos and Vilagi 2024).

The West-Mediterranean Laboratory of the Foundation for Democracy and Innovation with this symposium and workshop during the Fair, will promote the role of social and digital innovation in strengthening democratic governance. This discussion and debates respond to the growing need for inclusive, technology-driven solutions that improve transparency, civic participation, and public engagement in West Africa.

We invite scholars, researchers, experts, civil society, activists, community leaders, and influencers interested in the role of social and digital innovation in strengthening democracy to take part in the Symposium and Workshop**.** We welcome papers engaging with theoretical and empirical questions related to the role of digital innovation in strengthening democratic governance and employing diverse methodological approaches. Among others, we are interested in key aspects of Innovation and digital technology in the service of democracy around the five following panels bellow in this call (project 1: contributions to the symposium on innovation and democracy).

PROJECT CATEGORIES

PROJECT 1: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SYMPOSIUM ON INNOVATION AND DEMOCRACY

- ***Panel 1: Contributing to a definition of social innovation based on democracy,***

- ***Panel 2: What types of indicators should be used to measure social innovation in a democracy?***

- ***Panel 3: Technological innovation and citizen participation,***

- ***Panel 4: Data governance and social innovation,***

- ***Panel 5: Democratic Innovation, Social Inclusion and Digital citizenship***

PROJECT 2: CONTRIBUTION TO THE EXHIBITION ON DIGITAL INNOVATION AND DEMOCRACY

An exhibition focusing on digital content, interactive displays, and immersive experiences.

- ***Area 1: Digital technology and civic engagement***

- ***Area 2: Data, Algorithms and Power,***

- ***Area 3: Social innovation in the service of democracy,***

- ***Area 4: Digital disinformation: the challenges facing democracy,***

Submission guidelines

Applications in French or English, marked ‘Application for the 2026 Innovation Fair’, must be sent to the West Mediterranean Laboratory of the Foundation for Innovation in Democracy at the following address: westafrican.lab@innovationdemocratie.org no later than 7 August 2026 at 23:59 GMT.

Important

(1) A summary of your empirical project (technically feasible) (individual or team) for the **fair exhibition**.
(2) A summary of your topic for the **symposium** (250 words, title, panel indication, name, institutional affiliation, problem, interest, outcome for tech studies) and a short CV(1page).
(3) A proposal for **an app project** (max. 3 pages) including : -Objectives; - Expected outcomes; -presentation (video, photo); - A CV (1 page) of the project lead or the team; - A cover letter from a professional or expert in the tech field.
(4) Adherence to deadlines is essential.